

Below is a repost of two articles on the Importance of the Oval in Ornamental Penmanship. Please see the Ovals Reference Image posted in the FILES section of this group. See next message

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Taken from The Educator, April 1944

The Importance of the Oval

The oval plays an important role in ornamental penmanship. Letters are made up of ovals and straight lines. Ovals should be 2/3 as wide as long. That is the proportion selected by penman and artists as producing the most beautiful form. The position of ovals is usually upright slightly slanting (on the main slant) or horizontal. The ovals are made in either direction clockwise or the reverse.

As you examine the work of master penmen you are thrilled with the beauty of the ovals. Oh! How graceful and perfectly balanced the ovals are in the work of Taylor, Bloser, Madarasz, Zaner and others.

Look for ovals in good letters and you will discover that they are uniform in size, shape and direction. You should avoid mixing small and large ovals. For instance the oval at the end of a signature should not be wild, large and uncontrolled, but should be the same size as ovals in the letters. It is necessary to keep the movement under control until the word, signature, or sentence is completed.

As you watch carefully for ovals you will find in some letters the ovals are more prominent and complete as in O, E, etc. In other letters there is a combination of straight, lines and parts of ovals as in the D, u, etc. Yes, the upstrokes of u are parts of three ovals.

Circles were used in forming the earliest known characters. Even in hieroglyphics the sun and moon were represented. In lettering the circle has been employed extensively.

As various styles of letters were developed and more speed was required in writing, letters were slanted forward and took on more of an oval shape.

We marvel at the scientific formation of letters developed by those scholars of the past. Today we simply follow what they created. The more we study the more beauty we discover and the more respect we have for the men of the far distant past. Perhaps we are not as smart today as we give ourselves credit for being.

The movement required to make good ovals must be free and easy enough to secure smoothness of lines yet not so fast and free that the form cannot be made accurately.

Oval exercises have been used in teaching handwriting for many years. They help to develop both movement and form. If you can't swing a good oval in an exercise you probably can't make a good oval inside a complicated letter or combination of letters.

It is true that the oval exercise has been over emphasized by some penmanship teachers yet it has more virtue than many educators realize.

Persons who have difficulty in securing smooth, easy flowing business writing will find practicing oval exercises and ornamental penmanship will greatly strengthen their movement and their quality of line.

Taken from The Educator, November 1944

The Oval

The oval plays an important part in all good penmanship. Letters are made using the oval as a foundation. A penmanship oval or ellipse should be $\frac{2}{3}$ as wide as long. This proportion has been selected by artists in different crafts as the most beautiful proportion and is used as the standard proportion by penmen.

If you draw lines as suggested in the first example the spaces formed should be square. The oval, of course, should slant forward. Whatever slant the oval takes determines the slant of the writing. Where the oval stands up too nearly vertical the writing is stiff and awkward. Where it slants too far to the right the writing becomes illegible. We suggest that you measure different slants of specimens that appeal to you as being ideal. The body of the O is an oval as shown in the shady part of the second example. In the third example we show the finishing oval shaded. The finishing oval you will notice is approximately the same size as the shaded part of the body in the second example. The finishing oval should therefore be the same size as the body of the letter, and like the main body oval it should be $\frac{2}{3}$ as wide as long. This finishing oval should be horizontal and should be divided into two equal parts by the baseline. The body oval of the letter should rest on the baseline.

No. 4 shows how the final oval overlaps the main body oval and splits the oval into two equal parts. One of the beauties of fine penmanship is being able to divide spaces up into equal parts.

No. 5 shows the final oval swinging around into the body of the O, forming a parallel effect between the beginning stroke and the final stroke. This also shows the final stroke running into the main oval at one-half the height of the letter.

Now these may seem like minor points but the more exacting you can become in your execution and at the same time maintain freedom the more beautiful your work will be.

Apply the principles shown in the above illustrations to other letters. See how many letters you can make in the alphabet getting the same finishing oval in size and shape as appears in the O.

Expert penmen become masters in making graceful, beautiful ovals with no flat places, no kinks or wobbles and shaded only where shades are intended to be. Some penmen have the habit of riding the pen too heavy as they finish letters like the O. This shades the top part of the final oval in O and produces an awkward rather than a skillful effect. Develop a light free touch.

In Ornamental Penmanship the large capitals and flourishes can be made successful only when made freely, therefore, wear light-weight loose-fitting clothes on the arm. Tight fitting clothes prevent a free action. Cut off or roll up the shirt sleeve. A bare arm usually sticks to the paper especially in warm weather. A blotter or cloth under a bare arm will help.

Study the copies carefully before you begin to practice. Two things are necessary-perception and performance. You cannot make anything if you don't know what it looks like. You need to study the model until you have a clear mental picture of it when the model is removed. You should be able to draw the form with a pencil, showing the exact location of each part. Sometimes students underestimate the importance of some seemingly simple thing and thus make a serious mistake.

For instance a small e must have light in the center or it will be an 'i'. The n must have turns at the top or it looks like u.

Some strokes are repeated in various letters. In letters like H, K, N, M, X, and W, the same beginning stroke can be used on all letters. When you have mastered the beginning stroke you have gone a long way in mastering a half dozen letters.

First, try to get the shade located so that it forms the base or foundation of the letter. In the first exercise we come down straight to the base line spreading the pen until a heavy shade is made at the base line, but instead of finishing the shade raise the pen. This emphasizes the straight back and enables you to get better forms to the oval beginning part,

Next, swing the shade out along the base line, ending with a hairline. This is the foundation for all beginning strokes in this lesson.

The third exercise is the same as the second only it is surrounded by a horizontal oval. The horizontal oval and the upright oval part should be the same in size. Notice the location of the beginning stroke slightly above the base line. The shade should appear in the center of the oval. The two crossings, notice them, are at right angles.

Every stroke has a definite place and purpose. You can't just throw the strokes together in a pile and get beautiful forms. Spacing, parallel effects, crossings, location of strokes and shades, slant, size, and quality of line must be considered. By taking one thing at a time you soon master it and show a decided improvement.

Work out the different strokes and letters, then join the different letters into pleasing combinations. That is when it becomes interesting.